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# "JESUS OR CHRIST?"

BY

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## PREFACE

THE following pages, as will be only too apparent, are the outcome of a recent discussion, which in its turn was provoked by an article in the *Hibbert Journal* for January, 1909, whose writer vigorously challenged the Divinity, the supremacy and even the historicity of our Lord. That article had the merit of bringing together within convenient compass, practically for the first time, the arguments of a school of thought with which we in this country are as yet little acquainted ; this circumstance will, it is hoped, be held to justify sufficiently the frequency with which the paper in question has been quoted and referred to in these chapters.

From one quarter and another there have of late been made a number of attempts to dethrone Jesus Christ from His unique position as the centre and Object of Christian faith ; whatever the form of these attempts, whether they seek to reduce Him to a shadowy figure of vague tradition, or to dispute His originality,

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or to point to alleged flaws in His teaching, or to dismiss the whole matter in an airy aphorism—"Jesus was God, but so are you"—their ultimate meaning is one and the same, and calls for strenuous resistance. So far as the avowed enemies of Christianity are concerned, nothing, of course, would suit them better than to get rid entirely of Jesus Christ as a historical character; they know quite instinctively that to succeed in this would be to strike a fatal blow at the whole edifice of Christian faith, and we can well understand a militant Secularist like Mr. John M. Robertson bending his energies to the accomplishment of such a congenial task.

Perhaps it would not be correct to say that a similar hostility underlies, in every case, the determined endeavours made to convict our Lord of moral imperfections; but that these efforts—whether they are due to mere perverseness or any other cause—would, if successful, have the same injurious effect, cannot be doubted. There are always those who, for one reason or another, "will not have this Man to rule" over them; and one way to throw off His rule is to raise the ingenious plea that it is not perfect enough. Those, on the other hand, who feel convinced that if the sceptre of mora

authority can be wrested from the hand of Christ,

there will be a worse come in His place, will see the urgent necessity for meeting and rebutting the accusations of His would-be critics.

Two arguments have recently been put forward against the Divinity of our Lord as maintained in these pages, and on each of these a word may therefore be said in this place. We have been told that "it is nothing to the point to say Jesus was unique. St. Francis was unique. Shakespeare was unique"—would it be said that either of these was "Very God of Very God?" The answer is, Certainly not. The argument begs the question. St. Francis would have been the first to confess that he owed his inspiration to his Lord and Master, and, however great a man, cannot be described as "unique." But moreover, it is a certain *kind* of uniqueness which we predicate of Jesus Christ, and in virtue of which we see in Him the perfect revelation of God on a finite scale, *i.e.*, within the limits of manhood. Shakespeare's genius, while unequalled, was not of a religious calibre at all, so that a comparison is altogether out of the question.

But, again, it is urged that by the Incarnation it is not meant that the essence, the *character* of God, but that God *Himself* became incarnate in Jesus Christ. This is a sheer confusion of thought. Of course we believe, with the whole of Christendom, that it was God's own Self that was manifested in our Lord; but that is not to maintain, and Christendom never has maintained, that there was, during certain years of the world's history, no other God than Jesus Christ—that He who declared and prayed to the Father *was* the Father. God's infinitude, which "heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain," could not become finite and localised; nevertheless, what Jesus showed forth was Light of Light, very God of very God, so that "henceforth we know Him, and have seen Him."

In the hope that these chapters may render some small service to the cause of faith in an age of doubt, they are now given to the public.

*February 24th, 1909.*

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# “JESUS OR CHRIST?”

## CHAPTER I

### “JESUS OR CHRIST?”

“It is to the great and abiding credit of the scientific theology of the nineteenth century”—so commences a recent work on *The Early Christian Conception of Christ*—“that it has learned to distinguish between the Christ of faith and the man Jesus of history.” As a matter of fact, when the eminent author of the book in question, the late Professor Pfleiderer, spoke of “the Christ of faith,” he meant not exactly what these words primarily suggest to us, but what for brevity’s sake we may call the Christ of the creeds; nevertheless the note with which his

volume opens is a significant one—significant of a whole modern tendency—and one that challenges watchful consideration.

So far as this suggested distinction between Jesus and Christ, the one belonging to the realm of history, the other to that of faith, may cause men to ask themselves anew—“What do I mean by the Christ of faith?”—such self-questioning is undoubtedly a most salutary exercise; but that the idea of such a radical differentiation opens up alarming vistas will hardly be denied. If the distinction in question can be validly upheld, it is obvious that a choice between these two alternatives must sooner or later be made by all persons of sufficient acumen and intellectual integrity; nor can the nature of that choice be doubtful for long.

For among the forces which have exercised the most marked influence upon the mind of our age, none has made itself more strongly felt than what is known as the historical spirit—that keen sense of the supreme value of accuracy, that



determination to get at the truth by the application of scientific methods to the study of history, which found its classical expression in Ranke's well-known dictum, “I only want to say just how things have really happened.” If it should appear to be the case that the ideas associated with Christ are insufficiently supported by the Gospels, when the latter are studied in this modern, scientific spirit, the result may be easily foreseen; if such a grave disharmony exists, then it is obvious that just in proportion as this fact is realised by thoughtful minds, the religious conception of Christ will tend inevitably to pale and finally to disappear, being found devoid of historical foundation.

There is every reason therefore why we should ask in the most explicit fashion, Does the modern criticism of the New Testament, and especially of the Gospels, confirm the general verdict of the Christian centuries, and endorse the claims made on behalf of Jesus Christ by the consensus

of Christendom? Can we, in the light of the most unfettered research, continue to place Him in a position altogether unique, and are we warranted in regarding Him as God manifest in the flesh? Does His teaching, does His personality, mark, not a stage which may be transcended, but a culminating point, absolute and final? These questions are being asked; they have to be faced; and the present is an attempt to do so with all frankness and such absence of conscious bias as the writer may succeed in achieving.

Of the vital importance of our subject there can be no doubt. Professor Pfeiderer, after telling us that “the Christian religion and the Christian Church are based upon that early belief in Christ to which the New Testament and contemporary Christian literature bear witness,” adds that “it makes no difference whether historical tradition concerning Jesus of Nazareth has contributed more or less to this belief, or whether this contribution has been direct or indirect, or even—

which is of course most improbable—if it has contributed nothing at all; the content of that belief and consequently the essential character of Christianity abide the same.” With all possible respect, we confess ourselves entirely unconvinced. We fail to see, and plain men will fail to see, how Christian belief can abide the same, whether we have more or less ground for believing in the historical trustworthiness of our sources concerning Jesus, or even whether we believe that such a historical character existed or not. The image is so trite and obvious that one apologises for using it: but really one might as well say that it will make no difference to a building whether the foundations on which it rests are more or less sound, or even whether they disappear altogether.

Christianity rests, as does no other religion, upon the Personality of its Founder—a fact which has been instinctively felt ever since the Apostolic age.

Paul saw and proclaimed with the utmost clearness that other foundation could no man lay, and that neither gold, silver or costly stones on the one hand, nor wood, hay or stubble on the other, could take the place of Jesus Christ. He Himself is at once the centre and the foundation of the religion which has taken its name from Him ; and everything that affects our estimate of His status, His character, His historicity, unavoidably affects the very content of Christian belief. Too much stress cannot be laid on the fact that from the very first this all-importance of the *Person* of Christ has been recognised by Christian writers and thinkers of every school ; indeed, it is a most significant circumstance that the earliest and simplest of our Evangelists, the one nearest in time to the actual events which he sets forth, in speaking of “ the *Gospel* of Jesus Christ ” (Mark i. 1) means nothing more nor less than the *story* of Jesus Christ. That story *is* the Gospel, the story of an actual human life

lived under actual human conditions ; of a character of unique elevation ; of a Son of man who revealed Himself as the Son of God, and who is not incidental but essential to the faith of those who believe in Him. It would be difficult to frame a statement revealing a more complete misunderstanding of the genius of the Christian religion than those oft-quoted words of Theodore Parker’s : “ If Christianity be true at all, it would be just as true if Herod or Catiline had taught it. Nay, if He [*i.e.*, Jesus] had never so many moral deficiencies, . . . still His religious doctrine remains unaffected.” Such a statement, though put forward in perfect sincerity, strikes us as ideally and almost self-evidently false to fact and false to experience ; while the contrary statement by Professor Burkitt—“ Christianity stands or falls, lives or dies, with the Personality of Christ ”—appears to us to sum up the self-evident truth of the matter in the simplest if most emphatic language.

Thus, when a recent writer<sup>1</sup> asks us whether the claims advanced by Christians for their Lord and Saviour “are made on behalf of a spiritual ‘Ideal’ to which we may provisionally apply the word ‘Christ,’ or predicated of Jesus,” our reply is a twofold one: (1) No one would undertake to defend any and every claim ever set up on behalf of Jesus Christ by framers of creeds or even by reverent panegyrists; one may be a devout Christian without, *e.g.*, committing oneself to every clause in the *Quicunque vult*, or without assenting to the remark of a living theologian, quoted by Mr. Roberts, in which Christ is described as “the source and fountain” of all founders of religions, even of those who preceded Him, “in so far as they have caught a prophetic glimpse of His truth.” Undoubtedly, much has been written concerning Jesus Christ in the strain of pious hyperbole; and while that very

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. R. Roberts, in “Jesus or Christ? An Appeal for Consistency,” in the *Hibbert Journal*, January, 1909.

fact constitutes a tribute such as could only be paid to transcendent greatness, it would be quite unreasonable to expect us to endorse every piece of fervent rhetoric intended to do honour to the Lord. But (2) there is all the difference between this attitude of discrimination and the admission that, by assigning to Jesus the place of supremacy and predicating of Him a unique relationship to God and mission to the world, we mean only “ a spiritual ‘ Ideal,’ to which we provisionally apply the word ‘ Christ,’ ” and not the historic Figure of Jesus. We mean and we admit nothing of the kind. A spiritual “ Ideal,” to which no historical reality corresponds, in other words a coinage of the imagination, a hypostatized abstraction, is of no use—and we might add, would be of no interest—whatever to us ; we can do with “ ideal substitutes ” for Jesus no more than with similar substitutes for God. Just as little as anyone can pray to the pantheist’s “ totality of being,” so little can anyone

derive inspiration, comfort or help from a Christ of fiction, how bright soever the colours in which such a figure might be painted. The classical refutation of that delusion is familiar to every reader of *Mark Rutherford*, where an account is given of a conversation between Mardon, the freethinker, and Rutherford, at that time a minister, but struggling with doubts of a far-reaching nature. The preacher, says Mardon, must base himself above all upon Christ—

and how can he base himself upon a myth? We do not know that Christ ever lived, or that if He lived His life was anything like what is attributed to Him. A mere juxtaposition of the Gospels shows how the accounts of His words and deeds differ according to the tradition followed by each of His biographers. I interrupted Mardon at this point by saying that it did not matter whether Christ actually existed or not. What the four evangelists recorded was eternally true, and the Christ-idea was true whether it was ever incarnated in a being bearing His name or not. “Pardon me,” said Mardon, “but it does very much matter. It is all the matter whether we are dealing with a dream or a reality. I can dream about a man’s dying on the cross in homage to what he believed, but I would not perhaps die



there myself; and when I suffer from hesitation whether I ought to sacrifice myself for the truth, it is of immense assistance to me to know that a greater sacrifice has been made before me—that a greater sacrifice is possible. To know that somebody has poetically imagined that it is possible, and has very likely been altogether incapable of its achievement, is no help.”

This last speech, though put in the mouth of a non-Christian, states the Christian case against the suggestion of an “ ideal ” —*i.e.*, illusive—Christ, with something of finality ; and the persistence with which that suggestion continues to be made may be said to testify to the extraordinary vitality of error. All that Christ is or can be to the believer, He is in virtue of the believer’s assurance that he is dealing with an actual historic personality ; dissolve Him into a lovely, unsubstantial dream, prove even that the facts concerning Him do not justify that belief in His uniqueness and supremacy which men have entertained all along, and you have destroyed His dynamic, whether wittingly or unwittingly, for good and all. For

it is simply not the case that the content of Christian belief would survive or remain unaffected by the discovery that the central Figure of the Gospels was either wholly or even largely the product of imagination, His alleged sayings and doings a religious romance resting on the slenderest, if upon any, foundation in fact. An æsthetic appreciation of the half-withered frescoes of certain unknown painters, setting forth imaginary incidents in the life of a semi-mythical hero—not badly preserved, considering the exposure and lapse of time—will never move the world, or replace what the Apostle calls “the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me.”

Of course, if the contentions of those who ask us to distinguish between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history are true, it is no use for us to close our eyes to the truth—which will prevail, whether we like it or not—no matter what the consequences; only, it is no use either to close our eyes to the consequences,

or to pretend to ourselves that “ what was, shall live as before,” and that “ what was good shall be good.” Do not let us harbour any such illusions. We have at least a right to be quite clear concerning this in our own minds—that if the Jesus of history is found to bear but a scant resemblance to the Object of Christian faith, the ship of the Church, after riding the waves these many centuries, has sprung a fatal leak, and is literally settling by the Head.

Let us ask ourselves, using the language of sobriety and not of extravagance, What do we claim to have in Jesus Christ ? We claim to have in Him the Teacher of the deepest truths concerning God and man, the Discoverer of laws of life which have never been superseded ; we claim that His was the perfect life and character, and that He Himself is the Great Exemplar of the truths He taught, the Way, the Truth and the Life ; we claim, above all, that He is not only the Revealer but the Revelation of God, the grand,

historic proof of the Divine love which was incarnated in Him—that He, the Son of God, has *shown* us the Father in a way in which He was never known and loved before ; that God was in Him, reconciling unto Himself the world, and that His Cross is the supreme engine of that reconciliation. If He is less than this, He may still rank as a notable moral and religious teacher, or possibly as a sublime legendary figure clothed by pious fancy in ideal attributes—but He is no longer the Christ, and the power which makes Him unique has departed from Him ; we may or may not “ wait for another,” but must resign ourselves to our impoverishment as best we can.

In the following pages an attempt will be made to examine the various grounds on which the Christian’s attitude towards the Person of Jesus Christ is to-day impugned. Thus it is suggested that when the records are studied without prejudice “ a disturbing sense of disproportion between the claims made ”—*i.e.*, for Jesus

—“and the historical evidence legitimately producible in support of them grows upon the mind.” We are told that in our first three Gospels we have “only detached fragments of events in one year of His life”—or, if we accept the chronology of the Fourth Gospel, at most in three years—and that “these meagre, these elusive and tantalising reports” are altogether insufficient for the purpose of substantiating the accepted estimate of our Lord’s character. We are told that the belief in His Divinity cannot be maintained in view of His manifest limitations, as, *e.g.*, shown in the fact that He shared the erroneous views of His contemporaries on demoniacal possession, the approaching end of the age, and the authorship and historicity of certain Old Testament writings—to say nothing of the impossibility of imagining Him so much as interested in art or philosophy. More than this, His teaching is weighed and found wanting both in respect of originality and completeness ;

at its best, we hear, it was familiar already when He began to utter it, the idea of the Fatherhood of God especially being common both in Jewish usage and among Gentile writers of the period, such as Cicero and Seneca ; while He is further charged with moral imperfections—with countenancing slavery, fiscal and agrarian oppression, social injustice and the “ iniquitous principle of sex-inferiority ” which “ has inflicted infinite suffering on half of the human race.” It is even alleged that His very example in the treatment of disease was quoted by after ages as sanction for cruelty.

It will be seen that the indictment is a pretty thorough-going one ; certainly, it is brought forward with no lack of confidence, and if those who frame these charges can make them good, it must be confessed that we are left, not with “ Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God,” not with the “ strong Son of God, immortal Love,” but with a somewhat hazy, ineffective figure, possibly pathetic,

certainly not commanding. Indeed, the only wonder would be how it ever came to pass that the world should have deified, worshipped, insisted on the supreme worth and excellence of this slight and trivial personage ; how such a one could have come to be described in such terms as are familiar to every reader of the Pauline Epistles, documents composed within a generation of His death, and by a writer who knew His original disciples ; why, in a word, “ the world is gone after Him.” That is a psychological miracle by the side of which all physical portents related in the Gospels seem to sink into insignificance, and an explanation of which is incumbent upon those who represent Jesus as a by no means perfect teacher or faultless mortal ; we shall have occasion to inquire whether such an explanation, adequate and convincing, is furnished by them.

But before we hear the specific charges enumerated above, we have to go yet a step further back ; before we can even

decide whether the Jesus of history is or is not identical with the Christ of faith, we have to answer the query whether there was a Jesus of history at all. To that preliminary task we shall address ourselves forthwith, thus clearing the ground for inquiry into the various points in this new arraignment of the Son of man.



## CHAPTER II

### WAS THERE A HISTORICAL JESUS ?

“FOR about six years,” says Professor W. P. Schmiedel, the well-known Zurich New Testament scholar, in a lecture delivered in 1906 and since published in this country,<sup>1</sup> “the view that Jesus never really lived has gained an ever-growing number of supporters.” He himself, as we shall see later on, but may state at once, emphatically disclaims and opposes such a view ; but he ascribes its growth to increasing doubts as to the trustworthiness of our sources, and holds it to be deserving of serious attention. That the application of the principles of historical criticism to the New Testament should have produced widespread

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus in Modern Criticism*, p. 12.

unsettlement is the less to be wondered at when we remember the intensity with which the historical accuracy of the Gospels used, until quite recent times, to be held and defended. When, in this country, so cautious a theologian as Professor Sanday has no hesitation in declaring that “the narratives of the Temptation are on the face of them symbolical”<sup>1</sup>—*i.e.*, that they do not relate outward events; when we read, in a work written from the point of view of Evangelical scholarship like Hastings’s *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, that the story of the cursing of the fig tree is not history, but “a mere endowment of the Lukan parable of the barren fig-tree with concrete form;” when the average Bible reader learns that an extremely conservative New Testament scholar like the late Dr. Salmon towards the end of his life reluctantly but unequivocally abandoned the miracle of the raising of Lazarus as without foundation,

<sup>1</sup> *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 43.

such conclusions will cause in many minds acute distress, while in others they will give rise to a transport of scepticism.

If this and that and the other statement of fact in the Gospels is not fact at all but legend, it is asked, how can we be any longer sure that anything in the record is genuine history? If one detail is unhistorical, others may be; and if others, why not all? The better-instructed and more capable of understanding the methods of discrimination used by critical science would, of course, be proportionately less liable to fall into the error of this "all-or-nothing" theory, whose adherents see no alternative to the wholesale acceptance, save the equally wholesale rejection, of the sources; at the same time we must remember that even men of genuine learning may be betrayed—through some obliqueness of critical vision, through excessive emphasis on one particular point of evidence to the neglect of others, and even as the result of a strong doctrinal bias—into such eccentricities as that

of the late Professor Johnson, whose works, written to show conclusively that the Christian Scriptures are mediæval forgeries, remain with us as monuments of mis-directed ingenuity.

The historicity of Jesus Christ has, as Schmiedel says, been of late vigorously called in question, mainly from two quarters, viz., those who declare, with Professor Kalthoff in Germany, and Mr. Roberts in this country, that “ instead of the Gospels and their central Figure creating the [Christian] community, the community created the Gospels and their great Personality ; ” and secondly, those who, like Mr. John M. Robertson, see in the story of Jesus a creation of the same myth-making faculty which meets us in Greek, Egyptian, Persian and Babylonian stories, in the mysteries of Adonis, Dionysus, and others. Now concerning these two theories, it must in the first place be noted that each one excludes the other. If it is true that “ Christianity should be regarded as a particular development of social life, and

not as the work of a personal founder of a religion,"<sup>1</sup> it cannot also be true that the Gospel story is a conglomerate of a large variety of solar and other myths, as Mr. Robertson would have us believe. We draw attention to this matter in passing, because it should be clearly understood that even if one of these elaborate attempts to relegate the historical Jesus to the realm of unsubstantial imaginings should completely carry our judgment, we shall in the very act of confessing ourselves convinced by it pronounce the other elaborate theory to be a piece of ingenious futility, fit to rank with *The Great Cryptogram* and similar productions. Either Professor Kalthoff or Mr. Robertson must have sadly gone astray, whether from some mental twist or preconceived idea ; and while, if one of these deniers of the historic Jesus is right, the other must be wrong, it does not necessarily follow that if one is wrong the other must be right.

<sup>1</sup> Kalthoff, *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 3.

Kalthoff from the outset reveals himself as a *doctrinaire*, who stands under the sway of a particular theory of history, which he himself states in the following terms :—

The value of either religious or ethical ideas is far higher when they are conceived as a constructive product of the organic development of a certain culture than when, as is done in the individualistic theory of history, they are regarded as the personal contribution of a single genius.<sup>1</sup>

Given such a theory of the way in which the rise of religious and ethical ideas ought to be conceived—a theory which seeks to reduce the share of the individual in the shaping of history to a minimum—it is easy to see how the events of history will have to be brought into conformity with a philosophical system; not how things *have* happened, but how they *must* have happened, becomes henceforth the preoccupation of the theorist. From this specific point of view it might be just as plausibly contended that Lutheranism was “a particular development of social

<sup>1</sup> *Rise of Christianity*, p. 32.

life," and not the work of a personal, historical reformer; certainly, if the individual, the "single genius," is to be eliminated, we can quite understand that Jesus Christ, the greatest "single genius" the world has seen, must be particularly obnoxious to Kalthoff.

Neither is it difficult to understand that a writer who is palpably ridden by his own theory, should regard everybody else as the victim of "hypnotic suggestion" and the like. "It is only by a suggestion of this character," Kalthoff remarks, "that I can understand the persistence of the idea of a life of Jesus." He is quite sure, though he omits to prove it, that "historical research cannot possibly tolerate this prominence of one single constituent of the Christian religion at the expense of all the others"; and that "it is merely theological hypnotism that maintains the figure of such a [viz., historical] Jesus in the mind of our time."

Well, let us give a sample or two of the manner in which Kalthoff, with his

boundless contempt for scholars like Harnack and critical theologians generally, acquits himself in the field of criticism and argument, as distinct from apriorism and assertion. He says :—

Theological hypnotism derives a certain force from the fact that the figure of Christ in the Gospels has, in spite of its predominantly super-human character, a number of quite individual traits. Sayings of his are quoted in which we seem almost to feel the beat of his human heart ; stories are told of him in which we seem to have the very man before our eyes. But this fact only proves that, as no one questions, such sayings and stories are the work of a single individual ; there is no indication whatever of the identity of the individual (p.14).

This is “ criticism ” extraordinary : it is admitted that the Gospel story tells us in an unmistakable manner concerning a single individual ; the only improbability in the author’s view is that that individual should be the One named—the only probability that these sayings and doings should refer to some quite other, unknown and obscure person ! This, of course, is not due to “ hypnotism ” ;



we will instead ascribe it to the influence of an *idée fixe*. And, equally of course, it would be too much to expect a writer who is so at the mercy of his preconceptions to practise consistency from one page to a couple of pages overleaf ; we have just had Kalthoff's own testimony to the overwhelming impression of individuality conveyed by the evangelical narratives—yet presently he informs us that “ the Christ of the Pauline Epistles has far less individuality *even* than the Christ of the Gospels.” (*Ibid.* p. 17.) But we thought that the Christ of the Gospels had a great deal of individuality ; whence, then, this disparaging “ even ? ”

Here is another instance of the critical aptitude with which this author dismisses the historical figure of our Lord. The Gospels introduce references to the prophet Jonah, whose “ sign ” was the preaching of repentance to the Ninevites, and to whose activity Jesus, Himself a Preacher of repentance, alludes, finding in it a parallel to His own ; *but*, Kalthoff argues,

Jonah is an unhistorical figure, and, “if the Gospels find a parallel to the story of Jesus in that of Jonah, why should we insist on reading an historical personality into the one while we regard the other unhesitatingly as pure romance?” That is a query which opens up new vistas in historical criticism; let it be said of some reformer or administrator that his toil recalled the labours of Hercules, or of some statesman that he had the persuasive speech of Ulysses, and some future philosopher, making war upon the “single genius,” will find a weapon ready to hand—for if Hercules be mythical and Ulysses the hero of legendary adventures, how can the administrator or statesman be historical?

No less interesting is the accuracy which Kalthoff displays in dealing with the Gospel story. It has been left for him to discover the fact that in Luke’s narrative the birth of Jesus is represented as having taken place “under an open sky amidst the song of angels.” Really, what warranty has this writer for making

a statement which a simple reference to the text shows to be utterly unfounded? Luke nowhere suggests that Mary's Babe was born "under an open sky"; it is stated in the Gospel that there was no room for the strangers in the inn, and that the new-born child was laid in a manger, the inference being that Joseph and Mary—being unable, in the tradition followed by the Evangelist, to obtain accommodation in the overcrowded hostelry—spent the night in a stable, and that it was there that the Child was born. Still less ground is there for the statement that the birth took place "amidst the song of angels"; in the familiar idyll the angelic choir is heard by shepherds watching their flocks in a field outside the city, whither they have to repair in order to verify the announcement made to them by the angel of the Lord. The point is a small one in itself, but significant of the amount of care with which Kalthoff has studied the records before launching his dicta.

The same recklessness appears in the assertion that Matthew's story of the birth

set out the programme for his further narrative of Christ's history ; they give us the point of view from which he proceeds to tell the whole story, etc.

That is a statement Kalthoff simply could not make good ; there is no particle of proof for the assertion that Matthew's Gospel is written from the point of view of the virgin birth ; on the other hand everybody acquainted with the modern criticism of the Gospels is aware that a growing number of scholars to-day believe the original version of the genealogy in Matthew to have traced our Lord's descent from Joseph, and that the verses in chap. i. 18-25—where alone the virgin birth is mentioned—are a later addition.<sup>1</sup> But granting that the introductory chapters of Matthew and Luke are altogether

<sup>1</sup> For a popular treatment of this subject the reader may be referred to the present writer's *Jesus : Seven Questions*, pp. 74-89.

legendary ; or supposing we adopt the conclusion of Dr. Horton, who says :—

History, in the strict sense of the word, begins where Mark and John and Paul begin. The Idyll of the Infancy belongs to another kind of literature. . . . Poetry is as instructive as history, but not in the same way.<sup>1</sup>

even then we fail to see what Kalthoff gains in support of his theory. If the whole of a narrative must be discredited because it contains legendary elements, then there is, broadly speaking, an end to all ancient history ; if a character is to be dismissed as unhistorical because he is supposed to have been supernaturally born, then we must bid farewell to Plato as a myth, and relegate Alexander the Great and the Emperor Augustus to the limbo of exploded fable. But no scientific historian—indeed, no sane person—argues like that ; nor can any reason be adduced for applying such an altogether exceptional standard of criticism to the Gospels—except the desire to get rid of Jesus Christ at any cost, an aim to which it seems all

<sup>1</sup> *Devotional Commentary on St. Matthew*, p. 5.

other considerations have to be subordinated.

The same desire is apparent in Kalthoff's attempt to disparage the evidence of Josephus to the historicity of our Lord. The Jewish historian makes reference to the death of “the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ,” an event which is dated about the year 63 A.D., at a time when Josephus himself was a young man of about twenty-five. Jesus Christ, therefore, according to this authentic passage, was an historical figure in the earlier half of the first century—at least, that is the inference most people would draw; not so Kalthoff. “Jesus,” he says, “was a very familiar name among the Jews . . . and in Josephus we have a dozen men named ‘Jesus.’ Are we to conclude from the possibility that Josephus speaks, in a more than doubtful passage, of a Jesus who was called Christ to the identity of this Jesus with the one whose biography our theologians desire to write?”

It is worth while to analyse this self-revealing argument. That theologians desire to write the " biography " of Jesus, is pure fiction ; a biography means a detailed account of a life, tracing its events from birth to death, and the materials for such a detailed account are, as we all know, not available. Then the passage in which Josephus speaks of Jesus Christ is described as " more than doubtful ; " no reason is assigned, but if one were demanded, the only answer would be that the passage is suspect *because* it refers to Christ : that personage is " doubtful " *per se*, and if He seems nevertheless to be alluded to by a writer almost contemporary, it follows that the allusion to Him must be even more than doubtful ! Was there ever such determination to establish a case *per fas vel nefas* ? But the crowning point is the suggestion that, when Josephus speaks of Jesus Christ, he may have been referring, not to the one Figure who is known by that distinctive designation, but to some other

individual concerning whom nothing has come down to us. We are to assume, in deference to Kalthoff's theory, that though there existed, at the beginning of our era, a Jesus who could, half a century after His death, be singled out from all other holders of that name by the cognomen “ the Christ,” this person may have been someone quite different from the Jesus of the Gospels ; and the writer who propounds such a desperate hypothesis speaks of those theologians who decline to accept his reading of history as under the influence of theological hypnotism !

We hasten to the close of this examination. An author who calmly misinforms his readers that Paul's “ direction in regard to the celebration of the Eucharist ” in 1 Cor. xi., has “ no parallel in the words of Christ in the Gospels,” shows himself by that egregious statement alone to be disqualified for the self-assigned task of instructing us concerning “ the rise of Christianity ; ”



for how can anyone claim to be accepted as a guide in matters of speculation, who blunders so lamentably in laying down the law on a simple matter of fact ? And what, in conclusion, are we to say of the following dogmatic deliverance—

Any man who has learned to take the sociological point of view, and appreciates all the transitions, modifications, and retrogressions that have to be taken into account in the rise of new social forms will look upon the notion that a suddenly converted Paul permeated Asia Minor and the Balkan Peninsula, within the space of twenty years, with the Gospel of a Christ that had hitherto been quite unknown there, and set up a number of Christian institutions there, as a miracle beside which all the others related in ecclesiastical history are mere child's play.<sup>1</sup>

With a touch of pardonable impatience one asks—In the name of all that is reasonable, WHY ? What mysterious impossibility is there in Paul's missionary journeys, an impossibility which has escaped such minute and painstaking students as Sir William Ramsay and Professor Harnáck, but reveals itself so

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

patently to Professor Kalthoff? We cannot simply content ourselves with his *ipse dixit*. The truth is, Kalthoff's preconceived theory plays the part of a bed of Procrustes; the facts have to be either amputated or tortured in order to suit the proportions of his philosophy of history as it *ought* to have happened. And it is upon such grounds as these that Christians are asked to abandon the very foundation of their faith!

It may very probably be thought that we have spent far too much time in demonstrating the extraordinary futility of the arguments by which Kalthoff supports his denial of Jesus as a historical figure; nor would it have been necessary to do so at such length, but that his book has been circulated in an English version by the Rationalist Press Association as part of their anti-Christian propaganda. We can now leave it to the reader to judge what value attaches to the statement of Mr. Roberts, who says,<sup>1</sup> “ We reach

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*, p. 357.

the position of Professor Kalthoff, from which the figure of the historic Jesus has completely vanished." We venture to think that we speak for the majority of people who understand the meaning of evidence, in replying point-blank that we do nothing of the kind.

We began by saying of the two mutually destructive theories which seek to explain Jesus away—the sociological and the mythical—that if the one was right, the other must be wrong ; adding, however, that it did not necessarily follow that if the one was wrong the other must be right. If Professor Kalthoff's arguments leave us unconvinced, have those of Mr. John M. Robertson a better claim to our acceptance ? It would, of course, be impossible for us to enter into a detailed examination of this author's two elaborate volumes, *Christianity and Mythology* and *Pagan Christs*, in which he maintains the thesis that Christianity is largely made up of elements common to Mithraism,

Krishnaism, and a variety of other cults, and that Jesus Himself—*i.e.*, the Jesus believed in by Christians—is a mythical personage; another method, however, is available, viz., that of showing by selected instances the kind of arguments by which Mr. Robertson has satisfied himself of the unhistorical character of the Gospel story and its central Figure. This task has already been performed for the general reader's benefit by Dr. Estlin Carpenter, an eminent scholar who cannot be held to write in the interests of orthodoxy; and in drawing upon his pages <sup>1</sup> we have the satisfaction of knowing that we commit ourselves to a guide who unites distinguished erudition to perfect integrity of judgment.

Mr. Robertson's hypothesis is that there existed at some time before our era—probably about 100 B.C.—a “cult-founder” of the name of Jesus, who was put to death for teachings which have not come down to us; that later on

<sup>1</sup> *The First Three Gospels*, pp. 293-305.

there clustered round this vague figure "the survivals of an ancient solar worship of a Babe Joshua, son of Miriam"; that it was this Jesus, *not* Jesus of Nazareth, whom Paul preached as the crucified Messiah; and that there were attributed to him in course of time "some actual utterances of several Jesuses of Messianic pretensions."

One preliminary comment inevitably suggests itself. Whatever may be said concerning this hypothesis, its author cannot be charged with want of imaginativeness. Professor Kalthoff gave us one Jesus Christ other than the Personality depicted in the Gospels; Mr. Robertson, with something like regal prodigality, assumes "*several* Jesuses of Messianic pretensions," whose utterances, for some strange, unstated reason, blended so naturally as to produce, when read, say, in the Synoptics, all the effect of being the expression of one single individuality. It is true that history is silent concerning these several claimants to the Messianic dignity, all of whom, curiously enough, went by the

name of Jesus ; but this is a world full of curious coincidences—especially the world of the mythologist. It is equally true that this general statement about “ several Jesuses of Messianic pretensions ” seems at variance with the reference of Josephus, noted above, to “ the brother of Jesus, *the* so-called Christ,” which points plainly to one such well-known personage ; but a writer who rejects the whole Gospel story as too improbable for credence must be allowed standards of probability of his own.

The deliberate verdict of a competent critic like Dr. Carpenter on Mr. Robertson and his thesis may be given in his own words ; he finds this author guilty of “ constant inaccuracy,” “ suppression of evidence,” “ treating the wildest conjectures as historic facts,” and “ inability to use his materials ” ; his writings, he declares, while they show wide reading, “ are disfigured by a recklessness of assertion, and a serious incapacity to estimate historical conditions, which

greatly impair their value" ; and he sums up his conclusion upon the writer's main contention as follows : " No historical student needs to be warned against these preposterous pretensions "—a verdict which, severe though it is, he justifies by instance after instance.

Thus, *e.g.*, any careful reader of Matt. xxi. 5-7, must have noticed that the Evangelist makes Jesus mount and ride into Jerusalem upon *two* animals, an ass and a colt—a touch plainly due to a misunderstanding of the passage from Zechariah which is expressly quoted—" Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass." The clause " and upon a colt, etc.," illustrates that common device of Hebrew poetry known as parallelism, which consists in stating the same idea twice over in different words ; obviously the prophet did not mean to suggest the impossible feat of the King riding on an ass *and* a colt, but the Evangelist erroneously gave a literal interpretation to the words.

This natural explanation, however, does not satisfy Mr. Robertson. Matthew's slip, he argues, was not a slip at all ; it is a reminiscence of the myth of Dionysus who, when made mad by Juno, met in his wanderings two asses, mounted on one of which he passed a vast morass or river, and so reached the temple of Dodona, where he recovered his senses. And Dionysus on two asses—though we were but just told that he only rode on one—is somehow symbolic of the sun in its zenith ; *ergo*, Jesus on the two asses “ signifies that the Sun-God is at its highest pitch of glory, and is coming to his doom,” while as to the entry into Jerusalem, “ not a single item of the story is credible history.” And by such far-fetched theorisings as these it is sought to discredit a perfectly probable incident in the Lord's career, and to dispose of His historicity ! It is not too much to say that the rabbinical exegesis which made “ Hagar ” stand for “ mount Sinai in Arabia ” and “ the Jerusalem that now



is," grows tame and commonplace by the side of Mr. Robertson's breathless feats of non-natural interpretation.

Similarly, in this writer's view, the story of the driving-out of the money-changers is "plainly untrue, because Osiris is figured on the monuments beside the Nile bearing in his hand a flail or scourge ! The incidents of the fatal night, 'the crown of thorns, the scourging and the kingly title, may without hesitation be held to be mythical,' partly because they are not mentioned by the Apostle Paul, and partly because the crown of thorns finds its 'root-motive' in the nimbus of the Sun-God. By what process the rays of glory are metamorphosed into a chaplet of pain we are not told." The crucifixion itself is pronounced as unhistorical as the rest. "And so," Dr. Carpenter comments, "out of bad philology and perverted history, the figure of Jesus is reduced by these methods to a dim tradition a hundred years older than the customary date."

We reserve for treatment at a later stage the improbability of the exquisitely human portrait that looks at us from the pages of the Synoptic Gospels having been produced by the myth-making faculty ; what we would urge for the present, and what a less biassed writer than Mr. Robertson would not fail to see, is that his assertion, which places the Jesus preached by Paul a century before our era, goes hopelessly to pieces on the Pauline Epistles themselves, or, to name only one, upon the Epistle to the Galatians. Mr. Robertson who, as we have seen, denies the crucifixion, has his own way of accounting for the constant references to that event which occur in the letters of the Apostle :—

If Paul's Jesus, who has taught nothing, and done nothing but die, be really the Jesus of a hundred years before, it becomes readily intelligible that, even if he had only been hanged after stoning, he should by that time have come to figure mythically as crucified.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 394, quoted by Dr. Carpenter, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

But the Epistle to the Galatians leaves to Mr. Robertson more than the crucifixion to account for ; there are Paul's two visits to Jerusalem, on which he met Peter, James and John, as well as James the Lord's brother. Obviously, the latter could not be the brother of a shadowy "cult-founder" who had lived and died a century before the Christian era ; obviously also, Peter and James and John are represented as the original friends and disciples of the Lord. The fact is, Mr. Robertson's hypothesis required rejection of the Pauline Epistles as unauthentic ; it is surprising that he should seemingly have shrunk, as others have not, from this heroic remedy, for it remains unquestionably assured that "if the authenticity of Galatians be admitted, the historical character of Jesus is beyond dispute."

Such, then, as described in this rapid survey are the theories, and such the critical methods, by which it has been

attempted in our day to shake or displace men's belief in the historical existence of that Jesus of whom the Gospels tell us. We need not dispute the sincerity of those who desire to press their negative conclusions upon us, though we may sometimes be moved to a smile and sometimes to impatience by the fantastic processes of ratiocination by which they profess to reach them; we may readily admit the perfectly genuine conviction with which Mr. Robertson argues that Christianity must have taken rise in a solar cult, while Professor Kalthoff insists that it should be regarded as a particular development of social life, and not as the work of a personal Founder. But over against these isolated and erratic attacks—made from mutually irreconcilable points of view—there stands the great phalanx of present-day New Testament scholarship, composed not of obscurantists committed in advance to some timid orthodoxy, but rather of students who in these latter days conduct

their investigations with the same freedom as the votaries of physical science, and whose conclusions are often anything rather than conservative. Yet upon this point they are all at one—that, when all the material has been sifted, all the evidence scrutinised, all the witnesses heard, and perhaps not a little that once passed unquestioned has been marked as poetry rather than history, one fact remains unmoved and immoveable—the point of departure from which our era rightly dates, the *terminus a quo*, upon which nineteen centuries look back: that cardinal Fact of history is Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER III

### THE JESUS OF HISTORY

In the last chapter we tried to show, mainly by illustrations drawn from the reasonings advanced by two representative impugners of the historicity of our Lord, how slender are the foundations upon which they base their negative contention. As a matter of fact, if it is true, as Schmiedel avers, that the disbelief in the historical existence of Jesus has of late years gained an ever-increasing number of supporters, we do not think that this result is due to such arguments as we have been passing under review, but rather to a sense of general insecurity arising from the abandonment of the older views of inspiration. From the one extreme of an unquestioning

and somewhat unintelligent traditionalism, the pendulum has swung sharply round to the other extreme of an all-questioning—and not necessarily more intelligent—scepticism.

There are always those who are incapable of suspending judgment ; there are always those who, once they move from their accustomed moorings at all, are “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ;” there are always those who will acquiesce in any statement provided it is sufficiently startling—and what more startling than to be told that there never was a Jesus ? In this country it may be doubted whether writers like Kalthoff and Robertson appeal to a large circle directly ; but it suffices to tell a certain section of the public that authors like these have demonstrated Jesus to be a fictitious character, or that the “general conclusions” of “Christian scholars” “entirely do away with the idea that the Gospels are credible and trustworthy

narratives,”<sup>1</sup> for such a statement to make a very considerable impression. It may without disrespect be surmised that it was general statements such as these, rather than first-hand study, which led Mr. Robert Blatchford some time ago to make the declaration, “ I cannot believe in the existence of Jesus Christ,” and such a categorical declaration, again, made by an author with a vast following, would doubtless impress a large number of half-educated readers, ready to accept their favourite writer’s word as a sufficient guarantee of truth.

But when we have seen how complete is the failure of those who would fain banish the figure of the Son of Man from history, we are met by further objections : granted that such a person existed in the first century, it is urged, yet how much, or rather how little, do you know about Him when all is said and done ! Is the amount of solid information concerning

<sup>1</sup> Cp. *The Transformation of Christianity*, by Charles T. Gorham, p. 11.



Him really enough to justify the current estimate of Him? Are you not building an enormous superstructure upon a most exiguous foundation?

We cannot do better than let the most recent exponent of this view speak for himself and those whom he represents:

The silence of non-Christian literature as to Jesus has more significance than is usually assigned to it. . . . When we turn to the New Testament, we have a body of literature whose evidential value has been, and still is, the riddle of Christendom. Close and careful reading of its documents reduces our knowledge of the actual facts of the life of Jesus to a small, and, it must be added, a narrowing compass. Beyond the narrative of birth and infancy and one incident in the boyhood, the Synoptists give us only detached fragments of events in one year of His life. The Johannine chronology extends the events so as to cover portions of perhaps the last three years. Criticism, of course, greatly reduces the value of this face view of the story. Following it, we pass through narrowing areas of admissible statement.<sup>1</sup>

We further have it pointed out to us by the same writer that "to apostolic literature the Jesus of the Gospels, apart

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. R. Roberts, *loc. cit.*, p. 357.

from the incidents mentioned, is unknown ; ” that in the Pauline Epistles “ with one exception, we have no single statement of the teaching produced in Jesus’ own words,” that “ the fact that the Christian documents nearest to His times do not consider it worth while to quote His words is not a little disconcerting ” ; and the conclusion is summed up as “ a disturbing sense of disproportion between the claims made ”—viz., on behalf of the Jesus of history—“ and the historical evidence legitimately producible in support of them.”

In reading observations such as these we grow conscious that, although something has been gained by us when we have reassured ourselves that Jesus belongs to history and not to fiction, yet that bare assurance does not carry us very far. The writer just quoted has no doubt expressed what he feels to be a genuine difficulty, and unless that difficulty can be met, we are really not much better off than with a merely mythical Christ ; for

if our knowledge of the Founder of our religion is so provokingly meagre as Mr. Roberts represents it, then we must own that our data are simply insufficient—apart from everything else—to sustain that view of the Personality of Jesus which makes Him the Christ of faith. At the same time it is perhaps fair, even at this point, to ask the question at which we hinted toward the close of our introductory chapter—viz., how it can have come to pass, if the character of Jesus is really one concerning which very little can be positively affirmed, that He has drawn to Himself the love and admiration of humanity in such an unrivalled degree, and been hailed by unnumbered millions as Lord and Saviour. Let us, at any rate, see whether Mr. Roberts's presentation of the case is one that must be accepted.

To begin with the silence of non-Christian literature as to Jesus, this is, of course, speaking broadly, a matter of fact; the significance of that silence on the other

hand is a matter of opinion. It will surprise us, if we expect the non-Christian producers of the literature of that age to look upon Jesus through our eyes ; it will cease to surprise us, we venture to think, if we will try instead to look at Him through theirs. It is only with an effort that we can conceive of how little account the circumstances attending our Lord's ministry and death must have been to the great Græco-Roman world on whose outskirts this—to all seeming obscure—drama was acted out. To the Roman authorities it was only another one of those fanatical, semi-religious, semi-political disturbances which made the government of that particular province so burdensome ; a quarrel between different sections of this incomprehensible nation, settled in the quickest way by the summary execution of the alleged ring-leader of the less popular party. Why so apparently trivial an event should have found mention in the literature of the age—a literature composed by

people to whom Palestinian interests and ideals were utterly alien—passes one's comprehension. We have, of course, only fragments of that literature, and cannot dogmatise about that doubtless immensely greater portion of it which has been lost; but had it all been preserved, a reference to Jesus by a first-century Roman or Greek author would be of the nature of a surprise, especially as the Christians were for a long time regarded as a mere Jewish sect, and their Gentile adherents were predominantly drawn from the lower classes.

Turning, then, to our earliest New Testament witness, Paul, we are told that "the Epistles are practically silent on the whole life [viz., of Jesus.] They deal only with the death and resurrection. . . . Apart, then, from the death there is no Jesus in apostolic literature." That, again, is true as a surface view, and it must have occurred to many a reader that the Apostle tells us extraordinarily little concerning the outward events of

his Master's life. But on reflection this circumstance, puzzling at first, is explained by the scope and occasion of the documents at which we are looking. To express it rather roughly, the Epistles give us few biographical details about Jesus because they *are* Epistles, and not Gospels. They are not intended to give first lessons on the life of Christ, but are written to communities which have already received this kind of instruction orally—at least in outline, for as yet the reminiscences of those who had witnessed the Lord's ministry and death had not been collected and reduced to writing. All this is frankly admitted by a Rationalist writer, Mr. Edward Clodd, who in explaining why the Epistles “supply no account of the life of Jesus,” points out that Paul

was addressing people supposed to be acquainted with traditions then current, and moreover his main object was to set forth the relation in which he believed Jesus, as ascended into heaven, whence he was expected to return, stood to his disciples.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus of Nazareth*, p. 70.

The accuracy of Mr. Clodd's observations is attested by the very manner of the occasional, scattered, almost casual references which the Apostle makes to events in his Master's career; those references are of the informal character which shows that the writer was not telling his readers anything new, but that he alluded to a well-known and familiar topic. And is it correct, after all, to say that the Epistles "deal only with the death and resurrection" of Jesus? We will answer that question in the words of Professor Otto—distinctly a modernist theologian—who summarises the matter thus:

If the four great Epistles are genuine—and they are such—what stands assured is, first of all, that a personage of the name of Jesus had lived and wrought—a personage, unquestionably, of supreme forcefulness, supreme worth, and one who exercised the most enduring influence upon a knot of followers. We further learn that He had evidently exercised a teaching and preaching ministry; that He was surrounded by twelve disciples; that from His activity there had sprung a community of adherents conscious of their separateness from Judaism; that He claimed to be the Messiah; that He succumbed to the hatred

of the leaders of His nation and the treachery of a disciple, and was crucified; and that His adherents believed in His resurrection from the dead and His early return. Some of His words are quoted, and His institution of the Lord's Supper, shortly before His death, is recorded.<sup>1</sup>

Let it borne in mind that the Apostle was not concerned to undertake the task of inditing an account of the work and teaching of Jesus; that his Epistles are best described as occasional writings, prompted by particular circumstances in the affairs of these Christian communities or of their correspondent; that their object was to exhort, to comfort, to counsel, to expound Paul's doctrinal conceptions—and that, with it all, they are pervaded from end to end by the Apostle's intense loyalty and devotion to Christ. Such a phenomenon, in letters written only some twenty years after the crucifixion, requires for its adequate explanation a cause such as we can only find in an extraordinary personality—the Personality of that Lord and Master for whose sake Paul declared

<sup>1</sup> *Leben und Wirken Jesu*, p. 11.



that he had suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but refuse. Not the "biography," but the supreme greatness of Jesus Christ is to be read on every page of these documents which, while marked by the Apostle's strong individuality, yet claim and proclaim Him who is their constant theme as "their Onlie Begetter."

We come now to the Synoptic Gospels—"these meagre, these elusive and tantalising reports" concerning Jesus, which "give us only detached fragments of events in one year of His life"—and ask ourselves anew, What is the value and what the testimony of these witnesses? Of late years statements of the most extravagant and alarmist character have been circulated broadcast as to the alleged conclusions reached by the modern criticism of the Gospels, provoking dismay in orthodox and exultation in "rationalist" quarters. Thus we have been complacently assured that

Modern criticism decides that no confidence whatever can be placed in the reliability of the Gospels as historical narratives. . . It may even seem to justify a doubt whether any credible elements at all are to be found in them. Yet it is believed that some such credible elements do exist. Five passages prove by their character that we have some trustworthy facts about Him. These texts, however, disclose nothing of a preternatural character.<sup>1</sup>

This and the like travesties of the truth have been taken so seriously—the impression has been so widely created that some half-dozen statements and sayings recorded in the Gospels exhaust all that we can assert about Jesus with any certainty—that it is worth while to deal with the subject a little more specifically. We have seen that the Gospel criticism of to-day, even as understood and practised by the moderate school, has not left us with the old certainty that everything stated by the Evangelists must be literal fact. The birth-stories may be “idylls” rather than history; the Temptation narratives “symbolical”; some particu-

<sup>1</sup> *The Transformation of Christianity*, pp. 14-15.

lar miracle a misreported parable. Hence has arisen an urgent necessity for some new standard of discrimination, enabling us to say with a reasonable amount of certainty what may be regarded as historical in the Gospel story. If we could once point to an irreducible minimum of statements made by the Evangelists, such as could not by any possibility have been invented, then we might be able from such a fixed point to proceed a good deal further. It occurred to Professor Schmiedel that such an irreducible minimum might be found in certain passages which could only have secured inclusion in the record because they were *de facto* true—statements concerning Jesus which could not be described as the outcome of that worshipful regard for Him which inspired the writers of the Gospels, but as a matter of fact rather ran counter to that feeling. Schmiedel finds nine such statements in the Synoptics, the five most important among them being the passage in Mark iii. 21, which tells us that the

Lord's friends—*i.e.*, His mother and brethren; *cp.* ver. 32—once thought Him beside Himself, and meant to place Him under restraint; Mark xiii. 32, where He avows His ignorance of “ that day and that hour; ” Mark x. 18, where He disclaims the title of “ good,” assigning it to God alone; Matt. xii. 32, where blasphemy against the Son is represented as pardonable, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit as unpardonable; and Mark xv. 34—“ My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? ” Schmiedel concludes :—

If these passages had not been handed down to the Evangelists and those who preceded them, in a manner that made doubt impossible, they would never have found admission into our Gospels at all.<sup>1</sup>

But these “ foundation pillars,” as the Zurich scholar calls them, only furnish him, as the term implies, with a firm basis on which to raise a further structure; these passages, he says explicitly, once accepted,

<sup>1</sup> Preface to English edition of Arno Neumann's *Jesus*, p. x.

guarantee not only their own contents, but also much more. For in that case one may also hold as credible all else which agrees in character with these and is in other respects not open to suspicion.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, are the portions of the records of our Saviour's life which fall, in the judgment of this "radical" Continental critic, under this category—the category whose credibility is guaranteed by the "foundation pillars"? They are, in his own words, no less than

*almost the whole of the purely religious and moral teaching of Jesus, including most of the parables; it also embraces much that is said about various journeyings of Jesus, about works of healing of the kind that are known to happen even at present, about His entry into Jerusalem, about His cleansing of the temple, about His Passion and His death.*<sup>2</sup>

And even this does not exhaust what in Schmiedel's opinion are the legitimate conclusions to be based on his "pillars"; he says:—

Nay, more, I go farther and assert that of these statements, *all those which affirm something peculiarly great about Jesus*, or put into His mouth some

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. xlii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. xlv.

saying of marked significance, *must*, on the presupposition we have made, *be accepted as historical*.<sup>1</sup>

It will be seen how little ground there is for charging this scholar with the wild opinion that “no words of Jesus are sure except those which show His limitations”; and how great or how small is the justification of Mr. Roberts for saying that “guided by Dr. Schmiedel’s ‘pillar’ passages, we reach the position of Professor Kalthoff.” This is for all the world like saying that, guided by the sign-posts to London, we reach—Newcastle.

But it is further urged that, even if it be thus granted that the Gospels have a far higher value as historical narratives than is represented by the rationalist writer whom we quoted a page or two back, we have only advanced a very moderate distance; the records may be, in large measure at least, “true so far as they go”—only, it is contended, they do not go very far, certainly not far

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid*, p. xlv.

enough to warrant the altogether unique claims made by Christians for their Lord. That, accordingly, is the next point which calls for consideration.

Are our data insufficient, regarded as an account of the character of Jesus, to justify the Christian view of the unusualness and significance of His life? If it is true that there is no more direct proof for our Lord's pivotal position in the history of humanity than the "detached fragments of events in one year of His life," must it be admitted that we have gone beyond all reasonable lengths in claiming for Him a name which is above every name? Let us see.

It seems to us that those who maintain that our existing materials do not suffice for the purpose of framing a clear estimate of the Jesus of history overlook the fact that the same materials have proved sufficient for that very purpose to many millions of people; and in the second place it seems to us that in their discontent with the *quantity*,

they have been strangely blind to the *quality* of the information available. As it is, we are not at all concerned about the fragmentariness of the records. We never imagined that we had the material for a complete " Life of Christ " ; criticism has not taken from us anything that is essential. The great things stated in the Synoptics concerning Jesus Christ, including " pretty well the whole bulk of His teaching " (Schmiedel), are not impugned but guaranteed by criticism, and His great things—though we shall have to deal with the contrary contention later on—are supremely great. Moreover, we recall Kalthoff's admission of the overwhelming impression of individuality produced by the figure of Christ in the Gospels—" we seem to have the very man before our eyes." So great is that individuality that it triumphs most signally over those prepossessions which coloured the minds of the Synoptic writers just as they colour the minds of modern witnesses. We may point to traces of



Hebraism in Matthew, of Pauline influence in Mark, of universalism in Luke—though to say that their respective accounts are “‘motived’ by different purposes” is to use exaggerated language—but the picture presented from their various points of view is unmistakably the picture of one and the same Personality. As has been rightly pointed out by Schrenck, “the astonishing thing is not that the Evangelists imported so much subjective colouring into their narratives, but that they imported so little.”

The clearness with which the Figure of Jesus stands out in the Synoptic records, sharply outlined and vividly coloured, is explicable only on the supposition that it is in all essentials a true picture of a true individuality. “Lifelike” is precisely the word that characterises it; and that means that its main quality is one that could not have been invented. It does not fall within the scope of the present inquiry to institute a comparison between the Synoptic presentation of

our Lord and that of the Fourth Evangelist ; but the reader who will make such a comparison for himself will at once grow conscious of the realism which distinguishes the former from the mysticism of the latter. We say quite positively that while the Synoptic writers were neither infallible, nor critical historians in our sense, yet in setting forth their story they have produced a picture which owes nothing to conscious art.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel portrait is amazingly alive because the Original was ; it is a case of a unique Subject triumphing over the lack of skill on the part of the artists, stamping

<sup>1</sup> To retort upon this phrase, as has been done, that no picture can be produced *without* conscious art, and that “ a picture is not admissible as evidence till it can be compared with the original, and in this case the original cannot be produced,” strikes us as an unfortunate argument. The latter statement proves too much for the purpose for which it is made ; for not only “ in this case,” but wherever an historical portrait is in question, it is true that “ the original cannot be produced ”—are we therefore to abandon ourselves to a universal agnosticism concerning the past ? The Synoptic writers were not “ conscious ”—*i.e.*, creative—artists, drawing upon their imaginations ; also, conscious art would have skilfully harmonised sources and toned down divergences in a manner the Evangelists have conspicuously failed to do.

His features upon the page, and leaving a truly speaking likeness.

But it will be objected that in saying this we are assuming that the Gospel *portrait* is complete, while the Gospel *records* are fragmentary. That is exactly the seeming paradox and real truth which we are prepared to defend. It is, as a matter of fact, a very superficial view which holds that because the Gospels do not trace the development of our Lord from birth through boyhood, adolescence, and manhood to His death, we cannot say for certain what manner of Man He was. We can and do say. It is useless to point to the gaps in these narratives, the unrecorded months, nay, the thirty silent years. Martineau, without intending it, refuted in advance the inferences drawn from the supposed insufficiency of the data furnished by the Synoptic writers, when he said that "time is no measure of value in the deeper concerns of our humanity. . . . In a focus which is only a point may burn a light of the spirit

greater than you can find diluted through indefinite wastes of dull and hazy life.” Word for word this saying applies to the historic Jesus, though it was not of Him that Martineau wrote. We contend that there are very few personages in history of whom we have anything like as good a knowledge as we have of the Jesus portrayed in the Gospels. From the mere glimpses afforded to us by the Evangelists we know Him better than the subjects of many a tediously accurate two-volume biography. There are scores of elaborate memoirs published year by year—to be duly “remaindered” after a moderate interval—which we may read from end to end if we have the patience, without getting much nearer to the personality of the subject, because there was not much personality to get near to; on the other hand, we read Mark’s blunt and breathless narrative, and carry away an indelible impression of a Man unlike any other we have ever known—and, with reverence be it said, this unique

memoir, these rough jottings, will never become a "remainder." The truth is—

We live in deeds, not years ; in thoughts, not  
breaths,

In feelings, not in figures on a dial.

We should count time by heart-throbs. He most  
lives

Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.

Into these short and incomplete sketches there is crowded more of sublime thought, exalted feeling, world-transforming action, than may be found in whole libraries of decorous biography ; additional material might have been welcome, but could not have modified in any essential the picture we already possess. The gaps are immaterial ; if it is true that everything related of Him in the Gospels that points to peculiar greatness " must be accepted as historical,"<sup>1</sup> then, knowing so much, we know all we need. If science can reconstruct some specimen of an extinct species from a bone or two, how much more does the wealth of first-class historical

<sup>1</sup> *Cp.* p. 74.

material the Synoptics offer enable us to fill in the blanks !

Does, then, we go on to inquire, the picture of the historical Jesus presented in our first three Gospels warrant the language of devotion, of affection, of deepest reverence, which Christians have at all times used concerning their Lord ? We have recently been told that the evidence for the claims implied in that language and attitude, “ when closely scrutinised, is almost nothing.” Well then, we ask, by what extraordinary and unparalleled force of delusion has the contrary impression maintained itself during all these centuries, and how is it that that impression is still shared and emphasised by New Testament scholars who could by no stretch of language be described as traditionalists or reactionaries ? When has a verdict of admiration, so universal, so long unchallenged, been reversed on appeal ? Is it not just possible—to put it no more strongly—

that the truth may rest with that cloud of witnesses who with one accord declare that they have seen "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," rather than with the isolated individuals who with perfect honesty assure us that they have not?

The testimony of so absolutely modern and fearless a scholar as Professor Bousset should go some way to show how little the most uncompromising application of critical methods to the Gospels lowers or detracts from the resultant conception of the Son of man, and a somewhat long quotation may therefore be permitted:—

Jesus finally reveals to us by His teaching the true and ultimate will of God. In His heroic stature and absolute self-devotion, in His exclusive insistence upon the highest and best and His scorning of anything less, He stands perhaps at an unattainable distance from us, and even shows an unbending sternness, nay, an awfulness, before which we shrink. We cannot presume to measure ourselves against the hero. Yet He remains the conscience of His followers; His words are still the thorn which allows them no rest. With unwavering clearness He points out

the way which we must follow, even if He Himself is far beyond our reach.

He possessed the simple greatness that won the hearts of the simple men and women of the people. Wherever He showed Himself, His person inspired unlimited trust and lofty enthusiasm, and a faith which made the impossible easy, and lifted Him and His surroundings into an unfamiliar wonder-world. In controversy He was a rock of strength. His hottest and noblest wrath was united with serenest calm. He was invulnerable in dispute and ever victorious. Whom He attacked He branded for all eternity ; what He respected He made eternally precious. He turned the word Pharisee into a term of reproach, and exalted the despised Samaritan. The outcast and rejected He raised with His wonderful power and set them on firm ground. He could venture into a world full of dirt and evil repute because He Himself was strong and pure and free.<sup>1</sup>

We suggest that it must be something more and other than hallucination or thoughtless repetition of pious phraseology that accounts for such a tribute from such a quarter ; is not the simplest explanation likely to be the correct one, viz., that that something is the truth ?

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus*, by Wilhelm Bousset, pp. 157-158, 200.



There is a final and, to our thinking, quite conclusive answer—conclusive, were there no other—to those who tell us that the records which tell of the Jesus of history are too attenuated, too fragmentary, to justify the unique claims we make on His behalf. They assume that no cogent proof for the quality of His life can be adduced except that which is contained in the New Testament; as a matter of fact, the greater part of the evidence supporting the Christian claims is quite outside the New Testament, and its validity and cogency are confirmed by reflection. As Harnack felicitously expressed it—“Every great and potent personality reveals part of his own essential quality only in those affected by him. Nay, the more dynamic a personality and the greater his influence upon the inner life of others, the less is the sum-total of his being to be measured solely by his own words and deeds. One has to take into account the reflex effect produced by him upon

those who have accepted him as their guide and master.”

We conclude that a life which, like the life of Jesus, has produced unique results, inspired a unique literature, stamped its impress upon unnumbered souls, and shaped the history of well-nigh two thousand years, must itself have had a unique quality. The effect proclaims the Cause.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TEACHER AND HIS CRITICS

By this time our answer to the query which we quoted in our opening chapter, viz., whether the claims advanced by Christians on behalf of their Lord are made "on behalf of a spiritual 'Ideal' to which we may provisionally apply the word 'Christ,' or predicated of Jesus"—has become fairly clear. We said that a merely "ideal" Christ,—*i.e.*, a Christ of fiction—would not do; and it turned out that Jesus is neither a solar myth nor the "creation" of a community, but an historic personage, as real as Julius Cæsar. We said that even if He was an historic character, but one who was utterly shadowy, too scantily "documented" to leave a clear and sharp

impression, we were not appreciably advanced ; and it turned out that Jesus is one of the best-known figures—if not the best-known Figure—in history, and that the most strenuous critical methods do not seemingly produce, in a scholar like Bousset, who should know the effect of the instruments he wields, any of that “ disturbing sense of disproportion between the claims made and the historical evidence legitimately producible in support of them,” of which we heard from another quarter. Modern criticism apparently still endorses, instead of repudiating, the supremacy of Jesus.

But now that supremacy is being challenged in detail and on a variety of grounds ; and it is with the validity of these various criticisms that we propose to deal in the present chapter. It will be remembered that we have already briefly enumerated the various counts in this arraignment of the Son of man ; let us, then, inquire whether they can be maintained, or whether they rest upon some misunder-

standing which is capable of being removed.

The charges which we have to consider may be most conveniently grouped under two headings—intellectual limitations and moral imperfections. Christian reverence may, indeed, shrink from the idea of seeing the Redeemer brought before any human tribunal, and with such a feeling it is impossible not to sympathise ; at the same time there is something worse than the answering of charges, even if we think them most unjustifiable, and that is letting judgment go by default.

Jesus came before His contemporaries as a child of His race, His age, and His country. His education was that of other village children ; we may picture Him as a boy conning the alphabet, memorising passages from the psalms and prophets, with the same effort as His schoolfellows, even if gifted with a quicker insight than they. There is no reason to think of Him as acquainted with the Græco-Roman civi-

lisation of His day, its history or literature ; in regard to physical science and secular knowledge generally we cannot but believe that His horizon was that of a Jew of the first century. And *therefore*, say His critics, to speak of His supremacy or to claim Him as God incarnate, is neither more nor less than absurd.

Can we conceive of Jesus believing in and understanding the Copernican system or following the reasonings of Newton ? Is it possible to think of Him following the dialectic of Aristotle or entering into the enjoyment of the art of Pheidias ? Political science is a necessity of civilisation. But what proof is there in the evidence before us that Jesus had any conception of society as the product of human reason dealing with the facts of associated experience ? If Jesus was man only, these questions are irrelevant. But if He was God, they raise, for me, an insoluble difficulty.<sup>1</sup>

We may at once return the unequivocal answer that it is quite impossible to conceive of Jesus enjoying the statuary of Pheidias, reasoning with Aristotle, looking at the heavens through the eyes of Coper-

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. R. Roberts, *loc. cit.*, p. 361.

nicus, and least of all as talking about society as "the product of human reason dealing with the facts of associated experience"; but we must further say quite as unequivocally that we find it difficult to understand how such questions could be asked seriously, or in what way those limitations to which they are intended to draw attention are thought to derogate from the supremacy or the Divinity of our Lord. In the words of the most orthodox creed of Christendom, "the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God *and Man*." Now, real manhood necessarily involves limitations in knowledge, and is, as a matter of fact, quite incompatible with such an attribute as omniscience. And, omniscience apart, it requires only a moment's reflection to see that a Jesus conversant with Greek art and speculation—*i.e.*, moving in a different intellectual universe from the men and women to whom He addressed Himself—would have been supremely unhelpful

to them, as people usually are to those with whom they have not an idea in common. It is profoundly true that if He was to minister effectively to them, “ it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren.”

No doubt, the fundamental difficulty of those who point to the Lord's limitations in regard to secular knowledge is that presented to them by the idea of a finite God ; but the treatment of this subject we must reserve until our closing chapter. What, however, may be said at once concerning such questionings as we have just rehearsed is that they argue a serious misunderstanding of the true mission and the true greatness of our Lord. Any *Græculus esuriens* could have chattered to Him or to anyone that cared to listen concerning the art of the Parthenon and the wisdom of the Stoa ; but we do not go to Jesus for theories of æsthetics or rules of dialectics any more than we go to Genesis for geology and biology. But while to imagine Him so much as interested



in modern astronomy or ultra-modern sociology would be merely futile, the notion of these limitations detracting from His supremacy would be merely unintelligent—the doom of so much intellectualism. The supremacy which we predicate of Him is moral and spiritual ; and that supremacy is as little affected by His views, or absence of views, on art and science as by the costume He wore or the dialect He spoke. That the highest moral and spiritual insight should be compatible with very elementary ideas on economics is as obvious as that saintliness may co-exist with a complete ignorance of the germ-theory of disease or of the Higher Criticism.

In regard to this very last point, indeed, it is obvious that our Lord shared—and it is difficult to see how He could have helped sharing—the accepted notions of His time and people concerning the dates and authorship of the books, and the historicity of the narratives, of the Old Testament ; and the time is not long past

when His ascription of the Law to Moses, or of the 110th Psalm to David, were regarded as finally settling the points in question. So influential a theologian as Canon Liddon declared shortly before his death that it would be difficult to maintain the authority of Christ as a teacher of religious truth if the Book of Daniel were written in the second, and not in the sixth, century B.C. ; and even the miracle of Jonah was supposed to be placed beyond all possibility of doubt by the reference to it in Matt. xii. 40. But to-day we see that it was no part of the Saviour's work to determine questions of criticism, and that His “ authority as a teacher of *religious* truth ” suffers no diminution because He did not anticipate the results of modern Biblical scholarship. Indeed, the writer of the article on Jonah in Hastings's *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, treating the book as “ a fictitious narrative with a didactic purpose,” asks the question, “ Did our Lord cite details from the story of Jonah as facts, He

Himself thinking them to be facts?" and answers that this view "can certainly be held without belittling our Lord's Divinity or detracting from His authority as a moral and religious Teacher." Nay, we belittle and misunderstand the nature of His authority if we think that it is affected by the conclusions of scholars as to the date of this document or the authorship of that one. Far more important is it for us to remember that while He attributed the Law to Moses, He placed Himself above the Law, which at that time received superstitious veneration from His countrymen. "Ye have heard that it was said unto them of old time—but I say unto you:" from whence could an attitude of such unparalleled boldness have sprung but from the absolute consciousness of a spiritual status which was itself unparalleled?

Another and, we are led to think, much more serious charge against Jesus arises, however, from His attitude towards demoniacal possession, in which He apparently

believed, and towards exorcism, which He certainly practised. Now, for some reason, the writer who has urged these facts most emphatically of late as arguments against the supremacy of Jesus seems to find it impossible to decide whether they convict Him merely of intellectual limitation or of moral imperfection as well—or rather, he writes as though both the one and the other were implied. But it can only be one *or* the other ; the two things mutually exclude one another ; and if Luke, whose medical knowledge has of late found a strong defender in Dr. Harnack, saw nothing incongruous in the idea of healing a fever by “ rebuking ” it (Luke iv. 39) —a process which implies belief in the “ animistic ” theory of the causation of disease—it is small wonder that Jesus should have held similar views to those which were accepted even by the physicians of His age, not to speak of His countrymen generally. But, says His critic,

If He was God, He knew their belief in obsession was an error ; He must have known that after ages would quote His example as sanction for superstition and cruelty.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, if Divinity implied omniscience, He must have known that these nervous diseases were not due to possession, but that the belief in possession was one of the causes predisposing to these disorders ; but since the fact of His Manhood was quite irreconcilable with omniscience, He could not know anything of the kind, and the charge of moral imperfection breaks down. May we not add, in passing, that even had He been gifted with miraculous foreknowledge, He could not possibly have known that future ages would quote His *example* as sanction for *cruelty*, seeing that He never set such an example ? One might have thought that a recollection of what Jesus stands for in the lives of millions would have protected Him against so groundless and painful an aspersion ; surely, it is not too much to ask that, in

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. R. Roberts, *loc. cit.*, p. 366.

trying to prove *ethical* imperfections on the part of the Son of God, a critic who feels that he ought to undertake such a task ought also to be very careful how he conducts his case.

One additional remark ought perhaps to be made before we leave this topic. Whether we call the method of healing employed by our Lord “ exorcism,” with the first century, or “ suggestion,” with the twentieth, the unassailable fact remains that He was pre-eminently successful in restoring sufferers ; for, as the late Professor A. B. Bruce said in an article which fully recognised the “ limitations,” under discussion,

What we are concerned with is the question of fact. Now, as to this, the healing ministry, judged by critical tests, stands on as firm historical ground as the best accredited parts of the teaching.<sup>1</sup>

It should not be forgotten that, so far from claiming a monopoly of this healing

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. “ Jesus,” vol. ii. 2445.

gift, Jesus expressly pointed—when reproached with owing His success to Satanic aid—to the circumstance that the same gift was exercised by persons connected with His accusers (Matt. xii. 27) ; and we know from the reference to “strolling exorcists” in Acts xix. 13, and the testimony of Josephus—who writes as an eyewitness—that the same curative method was well-known and widely resorted to in the first century. But where others used their powers of suggestion professionally, as traders in spells and incantations, Jesus not only alleviated suffering from pure compassion, but He subordinated this part of His activity to what He felt to be His real mission, and when the former seemed to interfere with the latter, His choice was not left in doubt. Pressed by Simon to return to Capernaum and to resume His cures, He returns the eminently characteristic reply : “ Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also ; *for to this end came I forth* ” (Mark i. 35-38).

But if hitherto we have glanced only at the intellectual limitations laid to His charge—for we repeat that we cannot admit any *ethical* limitations being involved in the practice of exorcism by anyone who believed in it—we must now turn our attention to a group of more serious imputations, dealing with what Professor Pfleiderer calls His “complete disregard of all that goes to make up the content of social ethics.”<sup>1</sup> Thus we are told that He did not condemn slavery; He was silent on the specific evils of the fiscal and agrarian oppressions of His day and country, therein falling below the level of the Hebrew prophets, who had denounced these evils in unmeasured terms; and in dealing with the marriage relationship He endorsed and thus perpetuated the degrading conception of

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Origins*, p. 112; a few pages further on, however, Pfleiderer says that “the thought may have haunted Him more and more that He Himself had been called to inaugurate the redeeming kingdom of God by a religious-social revolution” (*Ibid.*, p. 123). But how could such a thought have haunted Him if He was completely disregarding of social ethics?



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woman as her husband's property.<sup>1</sup> What answer, if any, is there to this indictment?

As regards the first two of these points, it must be said at once that Mr. Roberts is in an odd position. No one insists more strenuously than he upon the extreme fragmentariness of our records, as wholly insufficient to support the accepted view of our Lord's character; yet for the purposes of his arraignment of Jesus he makes such use of the argument from silence as would be legitimate only if the records were the amplest and most detailed imaginable. They are not full enough to secure a favourable verdict, but full enough—by reason of what they do *not* contain—to procure conviction. But the prosecution cannot have it both ways. What right has the critic of Jesus, after all, for assuming that if the Gospels mention no pronouncement of the Lord's on any given topic, He must have been

<sup>1</sup>The Rev. R. Roberts, *loc. cit.*, and in *The Christian World* of February 4th, 1909.

“ silent ” concerning it ? How true it is, as Schmiedel says, that

critics, who in other respects show the greatest breadth of view, continually forget that Jesus must have said a hundred- or thousand-fold more than He is reported to have said, that the Gospels contain but a very imperfect extract from His discourses, and that all those utterances of His have been lost which not merely His first hearers, but even the following generation down to the date of the compilation of the Gospels or of their sources, did not consider of absolute importance.<sup>1</sup>

But we can afford to make the critic a present of this *argumentum e silentio* ; let it be admitted as likely that He who emphatically declined an invitation to act as arbitrator and divider of property, replying instead with a general warning against covetousness, did not touch explicitly on the particular ills of slavery, fiscal oppression and land monopoly—what then ? Must we say, “ So much the less Christlike He ? ” To answer the question in the affirmative would be to misconceive the Master and His message altogether.

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus in Modern Criticism*, p. 63.

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They fail to understand the Gospel, who complain because it is not "a law of commandments contained in ordinances." His method was another and a better one. The whole truth about this matter has been condensed into one luminous phrase by Schrenck, who says, "He lays hold of the evil which He finds among men, not by this or that excrescence, but by the root. He wishes to create new men; once created, they will live and move in new fashions."<sup>1</sup> Our Lord fought against social abuses by addressing Himself to the individual soul, inculcating principles which implicitly condemned those evils. Slavery and oppression of every sort are incompatible with the spirit of Christ. His insistence upon the good Fatherhood of God, and His immortal answer to the question, "Who is my neighbour?" pronounced a more effective sentence upon social ills than barren declarations of the rights of man or disquisitions on fiscal and agrarian pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus and His Teaching*, p. 156.

blems could have done. Bousset, who himself speaks of the religious individualism of Jesus, also points out the complementary truth, viz., that He continually and distinctly emphasised “ the root idea that the individual only grows and matures through human intercourse, without which the highest life is impossible, and that God Himself is only to be found in the love of one’s neighbour and the moral effect which that love entails.”

It may seem scarcely necessary to reply to the adverse criticism passed on Jesus’s commendation of almsgiving, on the ground that almsgiving “ implies a failure of social justice.” That is as true as that a Mansion House Fund for the sufferers from an Indian famine implies a failure of the crops ; it implies, in other words, the recognition of an actually existing state of things. Charity is not a remedy, but a palliative of the results from such a failure ; yet no one could seriously argue that it would be better to let the victims of economic hardship

perish—or to feed them with economic formulas—than to succour their necessity by charitable relief. When the principles of Jesus Christ are fully applied in the relationships between man and man, the need for almsgiving will disappear; but addressing Himself to actual persons in a definite social environment, Jesus—who has been blamed for being Utopian—dealt with the exigencies of the situation which He found in being, and prescribed almsgiving as an indispensable “first aid,” not as a final solution of the problem of poverty.

We come to the third point in the moral indictment of Jesus, viz., His attitude towards woman, as shown in His teaching on divorce, which is supposed to have sanctioned “the iniquitous principle of sex-subordination.” It is alleged that He “recognises the husband’s right to accuse, judge, condemn and dismiss the wife; while the wife, having no such rights as against her husband, or even over her own children, is left the helpless victim of her

husband's caprice ; ” that, in short, He “ denied to woman that right to divorce which He granted to man.”

Let us inquire into this allegation with the carefulness it invites. The Deuteronomic law, whilst placing restrictions upon the husband's unlimited right to “ put away ” his wife, did not recognise any corresponding right on the wife's part at all ; in theory at least woman remained man's inferior—though it is only fair to point out that in practice Jewish family life has always been singularly happy. It is on this theory of the conjugal relationship that our Lord pronounces His opinion, and what do we find ? He condemns it altogether. He rigorously opposes those facilities for divorce “ for every cause,” which always bear hardest upon the woman, but especially when she is in a state of economic dependence. So far from denying to woman a right which He granted to man, reference to our earliest Gospel (Mark x. 11, 12) shows that on the contrary He “ denies ” to

woman precisely what He "denies" to man, His position being that marriage is ideally indissoluble, and divorce only a temporary concession to human infirmity. In Luke xvi. 18, again, He does not "grant" but "denies" the right of divorce to man. Let it be remembered that it was precisely the dangerous facilities for divorce against which He set His face, which *made* the wife, theoretically, "the helpless victim of the husband's caprice;" whereas everything that renders the institution of marriage stable ameliorates in the first place the woman's lot.

But is it not still a fact that we have two recorded sayings of His—(Matt. v. 32 and xix. 9)—which recognise the husband's right to divorce his wife on the one ground of unchastity, without conceding a corresponding right to the wife? To this query a twofold answer has to be made. Taking these texts as they stand, they register a protest against the theory that a husband could divorce his wife at will—for every cause—so long as he complied with the

legal formality of giving her a bill of divorcement ; they assert, as Professor Bruce expresses it, “ a more radical right of woman—not to be put away, except when she put herself away by unfaithfulness.” It is, however, generally recognised that the qualifying clause “ except for fornication,” which is peculiar to Matthew, cannot be reconciled with the absolute pronouncements in Mark and Luke, is not in the manner of Jesus, and represents therefore most probably a Judaising gloss ; if that is so, then the last vestige of proof for our Lord’s alleged sanction of the principle of sex-inferiority is gone.

But we are content to let it be assumed that the clause is genuine. Even then the criticism based on it is an instance of the argument from silence, as patent as it is unwarrantable. What is the situation ? Jesus is being asked, and that by people who are setting a trap for Him (Matt. xix. 3 ; Mark x. 2) to give His view on the Mosaic law, which per-



mitted a man to divorce his wife ; all that the records show is that in His reply He strictly confines Himself to the question submitted to Him, and does not travel outside its range. *How, then, can He be said*, by not referring to another question, which He had not been asked—viz., concerning woman's status—to *have denied a right which was not under discussion?* And against whom but Jesus Christ, we may add, has such a charge ever been pressed on such transparently flimsy grounds ?

We have come to the end of the objections urged against the supremacy of our Lord, and confidently leave the reader to judge whether any one of them has been sustained, or whether they are not one and all the outcome either of misunderstanding or of a bias which we may regard as unconscious, but which is none the less real. We have seen the wild attempts to erase Him from the roll of history pitifully miscarry ; we have

seen that, so far from His being a remote personage of whom little is known, He stands revealed in the records with a vividness and a realism which bring Him closer to us than many of our contemporaries ; and we maintain that while such limitations of knowledge as He exhibited prove nothing at all derogatory to His greatness, the more specific charges of moral imperfection with which He has been assailed have in every instance broken down. Jesus is His own sufficient defence—He enters none. “ Hearest thou not how many things they witness against Thee ? And He gave no answer, not even to one word.” Mutely the Great Accused turns His glance of calm scrutiny upon His accusers, and in that glance the world, to-day as of old, reads the question, “ *Which of you convicteth Me of sin ?* ”

## CHAPTER V

### JESUS THE CHRIST

WHEN all the efforts to point out positive flaws in the Lord's teaching and character have proved of none effect, there remains one last resource to those who dispute His uniqueness. Whatever may be the merits of His recorded utterances, we are given to understand, they constituted no advance, brought nothing new, displayed no special originality, are "part of the literary output of the times and countries which produced them," carrying even in their noblest passages "the impress of their place of origin." After all, there are only a number of things which *can* be urged against Jesus, and it is not surprising therefore that this particular attempt at depreciation should

be a recurrent one. Sometimes that attempt takes a cruder form, as when Mr. Blatchford informed his readers that the Sermon on the Mount was merely an arrangement of old texts in a new form, the origins having been “ fully traced ” from the Old Testament, the Talmud and a “ pre-Christian document ” (*sic*) called the “ Teaching of the Twelve Apostles ” ; in such a case the answer is quite simple—the statement is untrue. Sometimes a writer like Mr. John M. Robertson sneers at the “ moderate ethical height ” of the parable of the Good Samaritan, as offering nothing wonderful to a morally educated Greek at the beginning of our era ; but we have not heard of Mr. Robertson having taken up Dr. Estlin Carpenter’s challenge to produce a match to that parable out of the whole of Greek literature, from Plato to Plotinus. And now again we are told that the sayings of Jesus are, after all, no more than in harmony with the intellectual climate of that part and age of the world. An instructed Jew

would be familiar with the thought in almost every passage attributed to Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Now, of course, if this writer meant that the setting of our Lord's utterances was that of the Palestine of the first century, that the utterances themselves are racy of the soil, or that He spoke in the language understood by the people—His own people—it was scarcely necessary for him to state anything so obvious; but if he means, as is evident from the whole trend of his reasoning, that this body of teaching contained nothing very new, we have at once to ask—Then why was it received as a novelty? Of all the strange paradoxes, surely one of the strangest is this, that there was nothing in the sayings of Jesus to startle anyone—only, everyone was violently startled; that He said nothing but what any instructed Jew was familiar with, but that the instructed Jews of the period promptly put Him to death for echoing the commonplaces

<sup>1</sup> The Rev. R. Roberts, *loc. cit.*, p. 358.

of their culture ! And the whole baseless contention is shattered into fragments by the one revolutionary refrain : “ Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time—but I say unto you.”

Were the teachings of our Lord merely “ in harmony with the intellectual climate of that part and age of the world ” ? Let us hear an unprejudiced witness, a great Jewish scholar like Mr. Claude G. Montefiore. Nothing can be more significant than to find such a writer, who might be excused for looking at his own religion through the most favourable glasses, spontaneously expressing the view that Judaism, in its own highest interests, should seek out, “ adopt and cherish as its own,” certain “ important elements ” from the sayings of Jesus Christ :

Doctrines and sayings such as “ He who loses his life shall find it ; ” “ Not that which goes into, but that which comes out of, the mouth defiles a man ; ” “ Not my will, but thine ; ” “ Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,”—can only, I venture to think, be disregarded with some spiritual detriment to the

religion which believes itself compelled to pass them by.<sup>1</sup>

Carefully though this is expressed, so as not to hurt susceptibilities which he could not but respect, it is evident that this devout Jew and sympathetic student of the Gospels does not share the depreciatory estimate formed of their contents by some Christians.

We think it possible, however, that in some instances at least the zeal with which it has been sought to show that our Lord made no new contribution to the world's thought, that His coming introduced no new factor into the history of the race, is due in part to a genuine but mistaken desire to bring Him nearer to His brethren by emphasising His limitations, and doing away with His uniqueness. It is in this sense that we interpret some of the endeavours that are ever and anon being made to demonstrate that even in enunciating the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God He did

<sup>1</sup> *Hibbert Lectures*, pp. 550-1.

not go beyond giving expression to a current idea of His age, which there is therefore no reason for associating in any special way with Him. “ Thus,” says Pfeiderer,

Homer calls Zeus the father of gods and men. In a higher sense Plato calls God the Father of the universe, who in His unenvying goodness desires that all should be as much like Him as possible ; hence it is man’s task to become most like God through righteousness and piety. Seneca, too, spoke of God’s fatherly attitude, by which He educated men to virtue. . . . In the religion of the Hebrews, God was the Father of Israel from of old ; the children of Israel were His sons, and the relation of Father and son in the post-exilic Wisdom books is applied not only to the nation as a whole, but also to each pious individual. The author of Ecclesiasticus calls God “ Father and Lord of my life ” ; in the Wisdom of Solomon and the Psalms of Solomon the pious are “ God’s sons,” and Philo speaks of the “ Heavenly Father ” who sends the divine powers down into the soul as into His temple, to purify and to sanctify it. From the Rabbinic writings we gather that at the time of Jesus the expression “ Heavenly Father,” “ our Father in heaven,” had become a popular substitute for the old name of God, which had fallen into disuse.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Origins* pp., 96-97.



And in even more insistent tones Mr. Roberts tells us that the opening sentence of the Lord's Prayer "was the popular expression among Jesus' fellow-countrymen for God," and asks, "Did Jesus' proclamation of the Fatherhood of God 'far transcend' what may be found in many a passage in Seneca?"

The surprising thing is, surely, that anyone who formulates such a question should not carry his inquiry a step further, and ask, How is it to be explained that a conception which was common property, which was literally on everybody's lips, should so unmistakably have struck the world as a new revelation when it fell from the lips of one particular teacher? A million people had said a certain thing a million times; a million-and-first man came and said the same thing, and it seemed to mankind that they heard it for the first time—what is the explanation of such a phenomenon? We suggest that there is only one: the differentia lay in the Personality of the

Speaker. *Quum duo faciunt idem, non est idem*; and when the same words are uttered by different men, they do not necessarily produce the same impression.

On the question of the acceptance of the doctrine of God's Fatherhood by the Lord's fellow-countrymen, Professor Schmiedel's verdict is of peculiar interest:

We must bear in mind how very much He stood alone in this conviction that God was like a loving Father. *The name “father,” as a term for God, was often indeed on people's lips, but it was never taken seriously.*<sup>1</sup>

Is it, indeed, possible, we repeat, that our Lord's affirmation of this truth should have produced all the effect of novelty if it had been a trite and threadbare plagiarism, if it had not possessed a *quality* of newness? If Jewish rabbis, if Roman moralists, taught the same thing, why has the world not accepted it from them, but from “Jesus only?” The reason was this, and the quality of novelty lay in this, that the One who now pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus in Modern Criticism*, pp. 40-41.

claimed the Father was no other than the Son—the Jesus who brought this message Himself attested it, because He was the Christ of God. He used the familiar word, but uttered it with an inflection, filled it with a meaning, of His own. The uniqueness which Christendom with one accord affirms concerning its Lord requires no other proof than this—that it is from Him mankind has learned to believe in God as its Father ; and here is the ultimate reason why the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are not two, but one. Others had spoken of God by that name—but He hath *showed* us the Father, and it sufficeth us ; henceforth we know Him, and have seen Him.

Nothing can be more striking than the extraordinary unanimity of the earliest Christian thinkers in their testimony to the impression made by Jesus—an impression made upon minds so different as that of the Fourth Evangelist, the Apostle Paul, and the author of the Epistle to the

Hebrews. Each of these represents a distinct and highly individual standpoint, yet upon this central Theme their voices blend: " No man hath seen God at any time ; the only-begotten—the unique—Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." " It is God who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." " God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers by the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His substance." We are not, of course, proffering these utterances as " proof-texts," but we are entitled to urge the remarkable agreement of these representatives of three different types of Christian thought in interpreting the phenomenon of Jesus. What they all express, with whatever varieties of phrasing, is the fact that this Man had somehow made God real in a sense in which He had not been real before

—the fact one of their number stated by saying that he who had seen Jesus had seen the Father ; the truth which they all assert is the supreme truth of the Incarnation.

But when we say this, we are well aware that this supreme truth is to some also the supreme obstacle, utterly bewildering, utterly self-contradictory—not so much a mystery as a vexatious and unprofitable mystification. The doctrine of the Incarnation, of “ God manifest in the flesh,” seems to them to involve “ a limitation within the conditions of a fleeting human organism of the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Perfect God,” “ an infinite God within the limits of a frail and fleeting human personality ”—and their understanding rebels at what to them seems a wanton misuse of words, “ reducing the sequences of language to incoherences of thought.” This is why they insist so strongly upon our Lord’s limitations of knowledge—for how

can God be other than omniscient ? This is why, from the same point of view, just as strong emphasis might be placed on His limitations in power—for how can God be other than omnipotent ? If the two definitions of the Incarnation just quoted are to be received as correct, then not only was the historic Jesus *not* God manifest in the flesh, but the very idea expressed by that phrase is unthinkable, because self-contradictory.

But we venture to think that it is the definitions that are at fault. Jesus Christ was no more omniscient or omnipotent than He was omnipresent. Just as surely as He was limited in space—unable to be simultaneously in Judæa and in Galilee, on the mount and by the lake-side—so surely He was also limited in knowledge and power. There were things He did not know, things He could not do. These limitations were inevitably involved in His Manhood, and could only be denied where His Manhood had been forgotten ; but they are not in the least incom-

patible with His being, in the sense of the original text,<sup>1</sup> "very God of very God," the express Image of the Father's Substance.

In what sense, then, is Jesus the Incarnate Word, if He is nevertheless limited in the respects referred to? Or how could the Infinite be revealed within finite limits? The solution of the problem is really less remote than might appear at first sight. Jesus did not come to reveal to us either the Divine Omnipotence or the Divine Omniscience; we did not need such a revelation, and it could not have been given "within the conditions of a fleeting human organism." The revelation which we needed, and which *could* be given within the scope of finitude, was that of the Divine Character, of the Divine Fatherhood manifested in the Personality of One who made that Fatherhood credible. The God whom Jesus reveals to us is not the Creator but the

<sup>1</sup> Θεός ἀληθινός ἐκ Θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ—"very God out of very God."

Father ; the attribute of Deity which shone through and transfigured the frail mortal vesture of the Son of Man was neither Infinite Power nor Infinite Knowledge but—unspeakably more precious—Infinite Love.

Nor should it be difficult to see how the Divine Love could be perfectly revealed under the limiting conditions of manhood, while the Divine Power and Knowledge could not ; for the ideas of omnipotence and omniscience are—to use what is, of course, very imperfect language—quantitative, while that of love is purely qualitative. Infinite love is simply love without alloy, a white and intense radiance ; and this was capable of being exhibited in perfect loveliness upon a finite scale, in a human life. That is the sense in which the Spirit dwelt in Him “ without measure ” ; that is the full and sufficient revelation we have of God in Christ—for God is Love. Instinctively men have seen in His Personality the expression of the Personality of God Himself ; and



though the creeds of Christendom have often blundered in expressing this mystery, the heart of Christendom has never ceased from enshrining it. Looking unto Jesus, we are convinced that He who lived the life of love shows forth the very life of God; we approach the Eternal through His Son, and know Him as Father, in the completest and most intimate sense of that word, which only He could reveal to us who lived in unbroken, undimmed communion with the Most High, so that it is true to say that He and the Father are One.

And having thus seen how One who lived a lowly life as a man among men—who worked at a handicraft, knew hunger and thirst and weariness, and tasted what it is for a man to die—nevertheless perfectly and uniquely manifested God, we are no longer perplexed by the suggestion that if Jesus was God, then “God died, God was buried in a rocky tomb—and what became of the world when God was dead?” For on the one

hand, we do not believe that the life of Jesus terminated on the Cross, or that the tomb held more than His worn-out frame, what time His Spirit was set free from the trammels of physical existence ; and on the other hand, while He was God manifest in the flesh, it is not to be suggested that He who prayed to the Father, was—to use again what we know to be very inadequate terminology—*all* of God : the Father is greater than the Son. And here the picture-language of the creed comes to our aid in describing Him as Light of Light—true Light, coming forth from the Sun, yet not all the Sun ; true God, coming forth from God, yet not exhausting the infinite plenitude of Deity. As we cannot glance unblinded at the noonday sun, so mortal minds cannot conceive of Him who is described as dwelling in light inaccessible, the Ancient of Days ; but in Christ we may with unveiled faces behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord—so much of God as we can <sup>T</sup><sub>see</sub> bear—and thus be transformed, if

we gaze earnestly and lovingly, into the same image.

In giving us His Son, God gave us Himself, just so far as we were able to receive that gift ; in Jesus Christ we have come to know what God is like, and henceforth our spirits are satisfied with that assurance which no one else could have given us. The race has dreamed many dreams of God, but in Jesus it has learned that its fairest dreams fell short of the reality, and that Love is at the heart of the universe. He has taught us the ultimate word of religion—"Abba, Father," and hence the revelation which He brought is full-orbed and final, a culminating point which cannot be transcended. Men had thought of the Eternal as of some mighty Potentate, irresponsible in power, jealous of His own dignity, exacting praise and obedience and sacrifices ; but in Christ they have seen God willing to seek and to save, bending down in pity, lifting up the fallen, ready even, incredible though it might seem, to

suffer and agonise for their sakes, loving men even in their disobedience and desiring them to be reconciled to Himself. “Hereby know we love, because He laid down His life for us”; for the essence of love is self-giving, and He loved us and gave Himself for us, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross.

This Christ, in whom we feel the Heart and touch the Hand of God, is no vague, unrealised ideal, no creation of fancy, no wistful dream of humanity; but in naming the Son of God, “we behold Him, even JESUS, crowned with glory and honour.”

“*Who say ye that I am?*” Jesus asks of each generation anew; and each generation makes answer: “*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

THE END

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